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# Carbondale News

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Located at north end of Church Street

## One-block section of Church St. had wide variety of business enterprises

By S. ROBERT POWELL

The stretch of North Church Street between the bridge over the Rackett Brook and the intersection of North Church, Belmont and Canaan Streets, as well as that intersection itself, are rich in history. Regarding the building that stands at 99 North Church Street (now occupied by Commercial Credit), we quoted in the NEWS, (August 17) Edith Gardner, Cemetery Street, who, on September 1, 1979, told Donald W. Powell "that Nick Moon used to have a blacksmith shop on this site, and that Thatcher & Avery's Candy Store and Finn's Ford Car Sales were later located in this building."

On August 22, former Carbondalian, Cy Grosvenor, Elmira, N.Y., wrote me a letter and stated that "Ms. Edith Gardner's statement about the Russell's Ice Cream Store at No. Church and Belmont Sts. is only partially correct." Mr. Grosvenor then offered the following amplification to the statement made by Miss Gardner:

"That a blacksmith shop was once located on the site is true. The business was operated in the street-level basement of a huge barn-like structure that extended to within 10 to 15 feet of Belmont Street. I don't remember the name of the proprietor of the shop, but I don't believe that it was Nick Moon. Nick Moon was the owner of a South Main Street meat market. I often took my sled to the blacksmith shop for repair."

"The statement that the Thatcher and Avery store was located on the site of the former blacksmith's shop is completely incorrect. The Thatcher and Avery store was in the building that faces Church Street, just over the bridge. A beauty parlor now occupies the street-level area in this building, the quarters in which the Thatcher and Avery store was located."

"Thatcher and Avery were the third proprietors of the ice cream parlor and variety store in the building still standing on North Church Street. Ed Beeler was the long-time operator of the business, then known as the 'Wide Awake.' Ed, a short, bouncy man who wore thick glasses, was one of those persons who require little sleep. He kept the store open from early morning until late at night. When Ed purchased a diner and installed it on Salem Avenue next to the bridge he turned over the operation of the North Church Street business to his niece and her husband, Jessie and Bill Lacour. The Lacours operated the business until the building was sold to the Thatcher sisters, one of whom was married to Ray Avery, a D&H engineer."

"Beeler's 'Wide Awake' was famous for its hot buttered popcorn and hot roasted peanuts. A fan over the entrance door blew the tantalizing odors of the roasting peanuts and popping corn to the sidewalk. Few could resist those smells and Ed did a huge popcorn

and peanut business. He also carried in stock and immense selection of cigars. The many cigar smokers of those days could always find the brand they preferred among Ed's huge stock. In the days when Zira and Hassan were the two best selling brands of cigarettes, Ed was reputed to be the largest retailer of cigarettes in Carbondale. I bought my first pack there (Ziras). That was how many thousands of packs ago?"

"On the site later occupied by the Russell's Ice Cream Store, a narrow building fronting on Belmont Street was built, prior to World War I. This building was long occupied by the Wesley Saunders Barber Shop and a shoe repair shop. I was recently reminded of the many times I visited 'Wes' shop. During World War I, Wes subscribed to Leslie's Weekly, the picture magazine of those days. The pictures taken at the battlefield fascinated me. When I recently read 'The Woman He Loved,' the story of Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, I saw in it several of the pictures I'd first seen in Leslie's Weekly while sitting on the bench in Saunders Barber Shop, pictures of the then-young Prince of Wales touring the battlefield in France."

"Paul Gill (his sister, Peg, still lives in the family home on Maple Avenue) served his apprenticeship in the Saunders shop, as did 'Red' Fitzsimmons who later operated his own shop in Vandling. The northern part of the building was occupied by a shoe repairman, Emilio, an uncle of Jerry Grippo. When I'd take shoes to him, he'd give me the envelopes of letters he'd received from relatives in Italy. I'd soak of the stamps and add them to my collection. Once he gave me an envelope form which he hadn't removed the letter. The letter, written in Italian, had the salutation 'Caro Emilio.' That's how I remember his first name."

"The Saunders Barber Shop was heavily patronized. Many of the regular customers had their own shaving mugs, kept in a large rack. Most had the owner's name imprinted upon them. Since many of the shop's patrons were railroaders, pictures of steam locomotives predominated among the scenes on the mugs. The proprietor was also a justice of the peace."

"If an officer brought in a prisoner while Wes was working on a customer, Wes would finish the haircut or shave while the officer and prisoner sat and waited. When he'd finished, Wes would walk to a table in the corner, seat himself behind it, then motion to the officer. The policeman would then order the man in custody to stand before the Justice who would then read the charge against the prisoner. The results of these arraignments often were that the prisoner was remanded to the County Jail to await the convening of the Grand Jury. Witnessing these legal proceedings made a lasting impression upon me."

"Finn's Ford Sales was located in the remodeled barn, the former quarters of the blacksmith shop. A ramp was built between the end of the shoe repair shop and the wall of the Old Catholic Cemetery. Up this incline were driven the cars that were displayed in the second story showroom, in which large windows had been installed in the southeast corner. It was in this showroom that the first Model A Ford seen in Carbondale was displayed."

"Thousands visited the Finn showroom and marveled at Ford's new car: a Ford with a gear-shift-lever-operated transmission, four-wheel brakes, a gas tank in front of the windshield, and a water pump! After many years of the austere Model T, the Model A seemed luxurious. The story soon spread about town that Homer Finn had taken out the car and had done 70 MPH in it. That seemed almost unbelievable. Seventy miles per hour in a Ford!"

"The Ford agency was moved to the North Church Street address from the building immediately north of the Baptist Church. Shiny new Model Ts were once displayed in the area that is now Dr. Falbo's waiting room. Cars entered the building by way of a narrow alley between the building and the church. A turntable was installed at the entrance of the building. Cars were driven upon this turntable, given a quarter-turn, then driven into the building. The turntable is still there, buried under blacktop."

"A large amount of Carbondale history is contained in that short stretch between the Church Street bridge and the Belmont Street intersection. Across the street from the Saunders Barber shop, in the building that housed the Geary store, was Dave Griffiths' Meat Market that, after Mr. Griffiths' retirement, was operated for many years by Ted Quinlan, the long-time employee of Mr. Griffiths. In the central part of the building was the Jackson Grocery Store."

"On the corner of Canaan Street was the Swingle Barber Shop. Mr. Jackson sold his store to George Case. It was at the Case store that Ed Delaney and I, both avid baseball card collectors, purchased the slabs of caramel in the wrappers of which were enclosed the cards, for 1 cent each. I still have, mounted in a huge frame, 87 of the cards I bought at Case's. The Babe Ruth card now catalogues for \$115. Other rare ones in the frame are those of George Toppor, the first glasses-wearing athlete ever to play major league baseball, and Bill Wambsganss, the only player ever to make an unassisted triple play in a World Series game (2nd Baseman, Cleveland Indians, 1920 Series)."

Can any of our readers add anything to the information reported by Miss Gardner and Mr. Grosvenor about North Church Street and the intersection of North Church, Belmont and Canaan Streets?

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